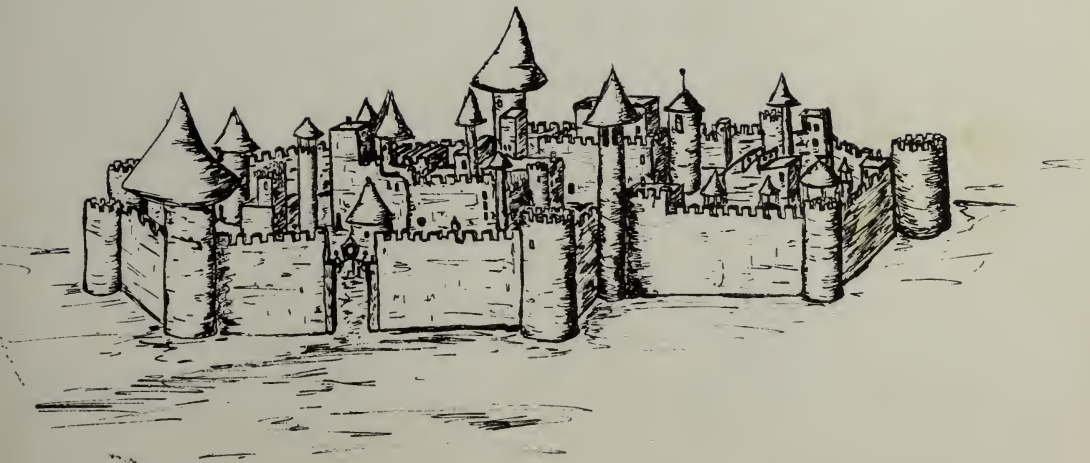


Courant

May 1972
Spring





The Voyage

The car was going 95 down the dark highway, the snow-covered pine trees were whizzing by the window. The headlights of the car seemed to be straining to conquer the darkness which surrounded us. Long stretches of road. Short curves. The only sound heard was the hum of the working engine and the spinning of the tires on the road. We had covered miles of road like this, no talking, no movement. Ed's hands on the steering wheel seemed to be the only animate objects in the car . . .

"Ed, shouldn't we stop and get some gas?"

Screwing up her courage, Marie had finally dared to ask her husband a simple question. She glanced at his crouched-over figure in the driver's seat. Then quickly looked away. And the car kept going 95 down the dark highway, the snow-covered pine trees still whizzed by.

"What the hel . . . ?!" Ed pumped the gas pedal with his foot. The car, unresponsive to this handling, slowed down to a creeping pace, and then to a full stop. Ed hugged the steering wheel with his arms and bowed his head over it. Marie stared in front of her, at some invisible object, her face bland.

"Goddammit!"

Marie still stared out of the windshield.

"Christ, Marie, didn't you tell me you could make it to Hanover and back on one tank of gas? I knew it, but you don't know what the hell you're talking about. Dumb broad! Jesus."

Marie's timid voice shook, "Ed, I usually can, I swear it. The only thing I can think of is that we went to Andover to pick up Libby. But that shouldn't have used up too much gas!"

"OH, GOD! Shut up!"

Silence. Silence full of tension and restrained emotions.

"O.K., O.K., we just can't sit here all night. Kelly, boy, come with me."

Ed and Kelly got out of the car. And disappeared into the darkness.

Marie let her head fall back on the seat, her eyes were closed, the taunt lines in her face relaxed. A long, heavy sigh of relief escaped from her lips.

"You know, he wasn't always like this. When we were first married, oh Lord, what a long time ago! Well, anyway, he was a darling to me, kind, loving and considerate. Oh, dear God, and the care and trust we both felt for each other. When our first child was born, I can remember *he* got deathly ill. Ed, relaxed, unruffled and comforting, stayed beside me and held my hand through the whole thing."

Marie looked down at her hands and shook her head, a heartbreaking expression on her face. "Why has this happened? Have we both really changed so drastically? No, I can't believe it. But it's so hard being with him now. The man with whom I have shared twenty years of my life, and have had four children by. No, it's got to be a bad dream, it's too unreal. I can't bear it. If this had to happen, why not quickly, lasting only a couple of

seconds? I feel as if, inside, I'm dying a death that lasts 100 years . . . It's like a beautiful dream that turned into a horrifying nightmare. THAT's my life? Oh, God, I don't believe it, no. NO!" Marie threw her head back, letting it rest on the top of the seat. As she closed her eyes, two tears ran down her face, trickling along the lines, caused by the many times she had smiled.

Marie shivered. She drew her short coat tightly around her small body. The cold air seeped through the small, unseen cracks in the car. She nestled up in the cold plastic-covered front seat, and gazed bewildered out of the windshield. The five feet of road in front of the car led into darkness, nothingness. Suddenly, with a sharp turn of her head, she looked out of the side window. The snow-covered branches of the trees drooped low, exhausted by the weight. Another shudder seemed to come up from deep inside of her. Marie quickly pulled her scarf, wrapped around her neck, over her eyes. She resembled a small child, who, scared of the dark and of being alone, curled herself up tightly in bed, in order to block out the nothingness surrounding her.

Marie moaned. "Oh, God, why doesn't this stop? I can't see any way out. I'm stuck, alone. All alone, and frightened. Fright and loneliness. That's all I ever feel now. Oh Lord, tell me what to do! Show me, Show me!"

The night produced two outlines, two figures, Ed and Kelly. Marie jerked her head up at the sound of Ed pounding on the window. Quickly she unlocked the car door.

"Oh, Ed, I'm so glad you're back, I've been so worried. You've been gone over two . . ." As Marie clamped her mouth shut, her teeth snapped. Ed's face was hard. Marie's eyes had the look of a hunted animal in them, scared and untrusting. She then slowly turned and faced the windshield. And she shut her eyes.

The car's engine roared. Ed started up, driving slowly as he first got onto the highway, and then sped up to his usual 95 miles an hour.

Silence reigned once again in the car. Silence full of tension and restrained emotions. The snow-covered pine trees whizzed by the window. The car's headlights strained to conquer the darkness through which the car plunged. Short curves. Long stretches of road. Never ending. And leading into more darkness.

Listen to me;
My name is Soul and I am lying here
All alone,
Trapped in a stone cold body
In the darkest corner of the earth.
I inhabit you;
You eat and sleep, but you do not live.
Why do you imprison me here in this morgue?
You shed no tears for me to sail to freedom on;
Your mouth opens and sounds come out;
But there is no meaning to which I can
cling to and flee to safety on.
Your ears hear what they want to;
No strains of emotion enter to keep me
company in my loneliness.
I am dying.
You have allowed me no exercise.
You locked me up in your head and forgot
of my existence.
No care do you possess for Souls like
my brothers and me;
Entombed in the living bodies of dead minds.
Please, I beg of you,
Open your eyes to the world and care,
For I am in danger of extinction if you won't
acknowledge my presence.
Even though your name is Apathy,
It's not too late.
I still retain the feeble hope that one day
you will see,
One day you will hear and feel.
I beseech you to realize that there are
others in this world
Beside your own self.
Then and only then, will I be fed with new ideas;
I shall thrive and flourish and spread the joy
of my existence to all.



Mrs. 2073

Decided she would have a child
Walked down to the astro-mart
And asked for seed with temper mild . . .

Nourished it for six months straight
By directions on the jar
She wanted to be mother great
She wished not her child to mar.

But when the careless disposal faulted
And happened to break the jar
Devouring her baby flesh and bones,
A grimace creaked on her metal face
And she decided she was not meant to be
A gardener.

Sunset

She called the dog, and walked toward the front door while struggling with her coat sleeve. How many times before had she done this? "Com on, Thistle, walky." The little dog ran from the living-room, eyes aglow, into the dusky haze outside.

Richard breathed deep of the cool, blue air, thrusting his hands into his pockets. He listened to his footfalls; tried to get his mind off the day. The crackling grit was a pleasing sound. His shoes picked the grains up more easily because it had just rained. A short shower, spring was coming. The sun blearily spread itself across a background of greyish blue, a pale orange against the darkening sky. The trees were wet, water dripping onto dead leaves, on the ground, the moist, absorbent earth. He stopped to listen to the secret sounds, alert, aware.

Immediately sensitive to the springiness of the evening air, she felt a garden bloom within her silently, smelling fresh and clean, different from the smokiness of winter. New crocuses and snowdrops close before the sunset. Did they close, like sunflowers? An Iowa farm surrounded her sudden sunflowers, the broad expanses of slumbering fields, indifferent to the changing light of the sun. Both those gawky, responsive flowers knew. She always felt the mysteriously quieting affects of the dying sun. Unlike the sunflowers, she felt herself open and disarmed and innocent before the orange sun. This time of day belonged to her.

He unwound, his cares sinking down out of sight temporarily like the sun slipping away from him like the water from the trees. The sky was relaxing her possessive grip on the sun, only to seek it again in the morning. The gloom gathered around him, mercifully drawing him in and on. He walked away from the insistent sun.

She continued down the road, the sun playing hide and seek with her, dodging in and out among the trees. She saw the lone figure of a man in an overcoat coming toward her. The dream descended upon her overwhelmingly and she almost gasped with the impulse to run. How ridiculous it would look, and she regained control with a struggle. Thistle began to bark, her little legs leaving the ground each time.

God, what a shocking noise! The dog had materialized as if at her terrified mistress's wish. Richard glanced at the darkly clad figure advancing quickly into his sphere. The dog barked at him frantically. The reluctant sun.

She passed, relieved, looking up quickly and away, and called softly to the dog, which finally backed away from the stranger who walked slowly on into the obscurity ahead. She'd never seen him before and wondered where he lived. Oh well, Chris would be home soon, and she hadn't even gotten the supper on. Maybe they'd go out tonight, just for a change . . . Her heels clicked into the fading light.

He heard her footsteps grow dim as her image paled in his mind, and, like the sun it slipped from sight.



I live on a high hill covered with eucalyptus trees. Because it is near the ocean, the fog comes often - - winter, summer, spring, fall — fog in the morning, fog in the night. When I walk, I see many silhouettes of trees and houses and smaller hills against the grey skies.

When the sun comes to my hill, neither frequently nor infrequently, it dries the eucalyptus leaves lying in the street. The leaves crackle when I step on them: they break into a million tiny pieces. Maybe someday someone will sweep the poor things out of the street and into the gutter and maybe the pieces will be there until they are covered with more leaves.

It gives me a funny feeling to step on the leaves but I do it anyway, and I do it deliberately. One step with the left foot, one step with the right foot, one step with the left foot - - snap!

How long have I been home? How many days? How many nights? I hardly remember what school was like. Let me think for a moment. I know that the halls were crowded and noisy, and sometimes it was all one huge kaleidoscope.

There in that kaleidoscope were people, too, besides places and things. My friends were in it. They laughed and talked all the time. Poor children, all the same, with their silly mouths opening and closing all day long and half the night, the hollow, shrill voices of my friends.

What are they now?

Don't they ever think of me?

But if I were to talk about people, I would not talk about those Friends. They don't matter now. What matters is - - what matter is - -

Sometime I want to run outside and stop the first passer-by and say to him, "Hey, I know two people, I know two people."

He would think me crazy.

But I do know these two people. Special people.

I see her house, the first person's house, if I look out of the living room window. It is a small house; it is old and pink with a red tiled roof and a great deal of green grass. Empty.

Rickety, tickety, tackety empty, because there's nothing in it. She died on my birthday, so she isn't there anymore.

It is empty.

She is dead.

The other is a boy. In ninth grade, when I first knew him, he was Good-Old-Chris-Who-Always-Kept-His-Mouth-Shut, and in tenth grade he was Chris-Who-Always-Kept-His-Mouth-Shut, and now eleventh grade is here and what can I say? What can I say?

"Hello," he used to say to me, "hi." That was a time when I wasn't sick (one hundred thousand years ago, surely), and I can remember it only by groping - - just as my hand used to grope in the morning darkness to turn off the alarm in the days I went to school. "Hey, Jessie," he would say, and "Hey, Chris," I would respond. When we spoke it was something like e.e. cummings poems we read in English, for "I" wasn't capitalized: it was a small "i" near his tale strength.

Perhaps if I met him in the street now, I'd say to him, "Hello, clown." He was a clown with a big smile and sad eyes and he performed in a high school instead of a circus.

Not that I think about him, nor are we likely to meet again by some crazy chance. If we should meet, we wouldn't stop for even one moment. I never think about hearing about him. I never think about thinking about him. Really, I don't.

He's gone now.

Oh, clown.

Hey, people, people listen to me; my kaleidoscope is going to be buried tomorrow; it's funeral is tomorrow. Come and see it. Laughters and stoners and shriekers, all are invited. They're going to drag it through the streets as they dance.

It was my own personal insanity and they took it away from me, those doctors took it from me, and they won't give it back.

You see, with the kaleidoscope dead and gone, it's as though a Christmas ornament had been broken accidentally. One moment, I held a shining ornament and the next my hands were full of shattered glass.

I hold silvery fragments in my hands now.

If I could cry a thousand tears, I would.

When I close my eyes and lean my head against the back of this chair, I can remember my childhood.

The first day of kindergarten, playing with red wagons, the puzzles made of wood, the old green piano.

I cried the day we learned to read. That sounds crazy, I know, but I did. I remember coming home that day and crying because the books were too easy to read: I wanted something harder. "I thought we were going to read real books, Mommy."

Oh, Mama, what did you answer?

Everyone tugging at boots on rainy days, and the lines of monotonous boots and raincoats and more boots and more raincoats in the cloakroom. Teacher with brown hair and brown eyes.

Oh, Mama, Mama.

I can't remember ever having any fog then. No fog, no fog, no fog, no fog, Rainy days, rain boots, raincoats, the windows steaming.

I learned to write script in second grade. "Children, the line goes u-u-u-u-up like this! He's going for a walk. Up and over and then decides to make a loop when he begins his trip home again. And that's called a G." My favorite part of school was writing. The teacher would put a paragraph on the board and we would copy it carefully. And sometimes not so carefully when we were waiting for the bell to ring for recess.

Letters. Loops and circles and Mr. G. wanting to go home. Wide lined paper.

"Children, this is a pen. We're going to start writing with ink today."

So we started writing with ink: ink on desks, ink on fingers and faces and clothes, and some used for the forming of letters.

Mr. G, you want to go home?

Hey, clown, do you want to come home? Do you want to come back to this city for the littlest, tiniest while and haunt the streets and go crazy? Huh? Come on. Come on. Ya wanna? I dare ya. I dare ya to clown, aren't you listening? Chris, you listening?

I knew him for such a short time.

Oh ca-ra-zee girl, ca-ra-zee girl. Whassamatter dearie? You can tell me dearie. Whassamatter, huh?

I'm crazy, lady. I scream it at the top of my lungs: surely you can hear me?

I have a play in mind that someday I must write down.

Oh, my dear, I just must write it down. I simply never seem to have the time for it, though. Doing nothing keeps me busy.

It is truly a great play.

I call it (in my mind, of course, in my crazy mind) "Happiness" and it is about that. It is about Johnnie Goodguy (I call him that because I love you capital G's that want to go home quickly). My play goes something like this.

See Johnnie Goodguy. See him walk. Oh, look. He has stopped. He sees a toad. Johnnie kicks the toad. They are fun to kick.

Johnnie likes toads. Kick, kick, kick.

The toad says, "Thank you Johnnie Goodguy. Now I can change into a beautiful-
allamericandreamgirl."

For it was a magic toad.

And the magic toad changed into a beautifulallamericandreamgirl.

"Oh! Oh! said Johnnie. "You have platinum hair ballooning around your face and your eyes are rimmed with gooey black paint and your make-up is all thick and pancakey and your clothes are skin-tight and you are so pretty."

"Yes, yes, yes. Tell me more."

"No," said Johnnie.

"No?"

"No. Mother says never talk to strangers."

"Oh, Oh, Oh. Well my name is Happiness."

"Hello, Happiness."

"Hello. Now hug me."

Happiness walked. Johnnie walked. Happiness ran. Johnnie ran. Happiness stepped on a mouse and killed it. Johnnie stepped on a mouse and killed it.

It is an old game. It is called Playinghardtoget.

Happiness hopped. Johnnie hopped. Happiness skipped. Johnnie skipped. Johnnie pursued Happiness.

That is the end of the play. It will run for forty days and forty nights on Broadway. Just like the flood, forty days and forty nights. And all the people who will pay a very large amount of money for their precious tickets, will weep and beg to be released from the prison of the theater when they see this great play. But I won't let them out. They must stay there for the full two minutes that it will take to present they play and they will clap and clap and there will be so many curtain calls and they will call "Author! Author!" They will be clapping with tears running down their cheeks and soon these tears will flood the theater and all the people will drown, all except me.

As for me, I will take sixty little, tiny seconds and put them onto a minute, take little minutes, sixty of them, and put them into an hour, take twenty-four of these hours and put them into one part of the universe.

And when I'm through with my career as a playwright, I shall write Japanese fairy tales.

I will buy beautiful things for Mama with the money I earn.

Mr. G.

Mr. G, of loops and circles and wide lined paper and past childhood, did you hear me? That hysteria, that babble about a stupid, stupid, stupid capital letter I had the idiocy to name Mr. G. Name a letter! Call a letter "friend!"

Mr. G.

Mr. God.

The thousand tears, now for my kaleidoscope that was.

When I was sick this year - - last year, really, oh, who cares - - they gave me allergy pills and headache pills and tranquilizing pills and antidepressant pills and sleeping pills and white pills and yellow pills and pink pills and green pills, all a part of my pretty kaleidoscope. It's a good joke, though, for they forgot to hand me my happiness pills. Little capsule of happiness in a bottle, to be taken every four hours.

Happiness with the girl in the house with the red tiled roof, dead and gone, and the clown gone. These two people, who both lived on this same hill once, have left me all alone. And being all alone is lonely. If I should leave this hill and go downtown, I know what I would find: cracked cement, an old tree or two, dirty streets, the day, catching my eye and making me turn my head away. Streets to cross, hard grey cement, rough and smiling up at me without love. Too many people. The space will be cramped, the noise will be constant, there will be no place to cry.

And I like it, downtown, away from this hill, these trees, these grey shadows, these shattered fragments.

But this kaleidoscope, this crazy kaleidoscope of mine?

No. You *were* crazy, you *were* crazy. It's over now. Monday, School again, people again, friends again. Friends

Monday. It's going to be sunshine, please Mr. G?



No, we cannot conquer the oceans,
A vessel is merely
An embararrassing attempt.

What a silly game we play —
The waters will always win,
And then again
Neptune will laugh —
His laughter crashing down
Upon our world.

We know the depths,
But they are
Deeper than ourselves.

So leave them for another world —
Their own.
Jesus did not really walk
Upon the water;
Only the moon
Is able to do that.

Nebulosity descends
in still, suspended flight;
lingers momentarily
to watch a blazing sun
poised gently over treetops
on wings of golden shadow,
like a bee about to bite
an apprehensive victim:
earth awaits and spends
but seconds bathed in light;
savoring red illumined sky,
and silently defends
the sun's mistaken right
to stay within the realm of day.
Hesitating on the horizon,
calculated darkness ends
a noble celestial fight,
and permeates the fading air
dissolving traces of the light,
as evening ultimately renders
us unto the night.

"Help," cries Organ Morgan, the organist, in his dream, "there is perturbation and music in Coronation Street! All the spouses are honking like geese and the babies singing opera. P.C. Atilla Rees has got his truncheon out and is playing cadenzas by the pump, the cows from Sunday Meadow ring like reindeer . . . "

— — Dylan Thomas

Rhapsody on the Spirit of Organ Morgan was written in response to a request for an overture to the Phillips Academy production of Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood* last December. The overture consisted of a medley of excerpts from the score and sections of Bach two-part Inventions 1 and 13, followed by a five-minute improvisation on several original themes. The *Rhapsody* as it appears here is a stabilized version of that improvisation.

Considered from a strict point of view, the *Rhapsody* is a pretty wierd piece of music. The abundance of repeat and pedal signs, the almost complete lack of melody, and the fact that half the piece should have been written in 6/8 time would make any self-respecting music publisher reject it at first glance.

But that's as it should be. *Rhapsody on the Spirit of Organ Morgan* is a passionate exaltation of all that is wrong, and therefore fun, in classical theory, a glorification of sheer volume and lots of pedal, of broken fingernails and boogie-till-the-break-of-dawn. It's my way of saying "thank you" to everyone who listened to me pound away at the piano and smiled.

the composer

RHAPSODY ON THE SPIRIT OF ORGAN MORGAN NOV. '71 - FEB '72
(THE UNDER MICKWOOD OVERTURE)

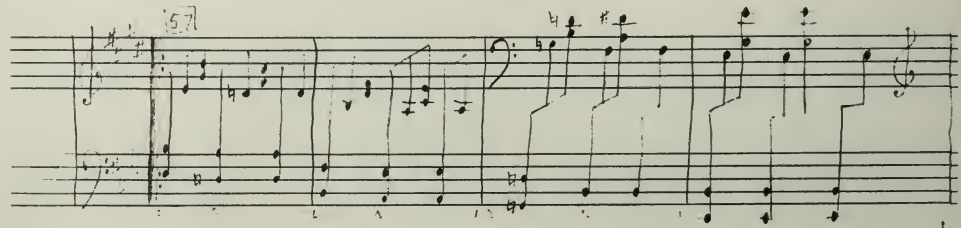
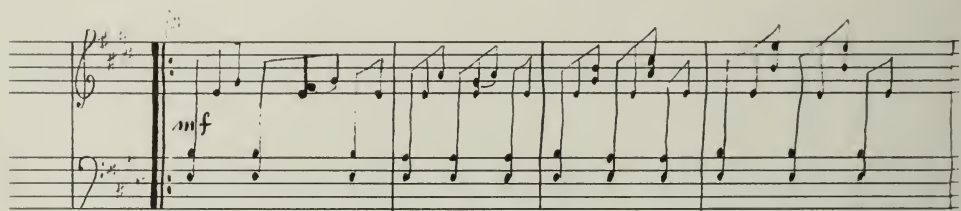
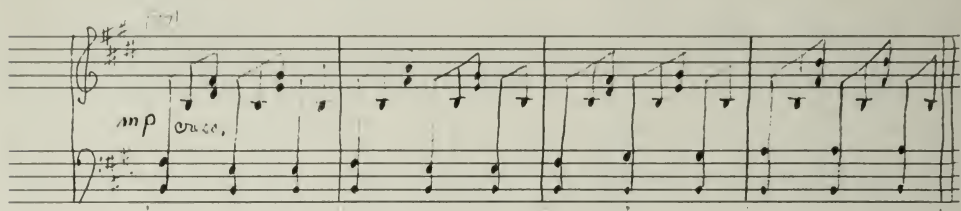
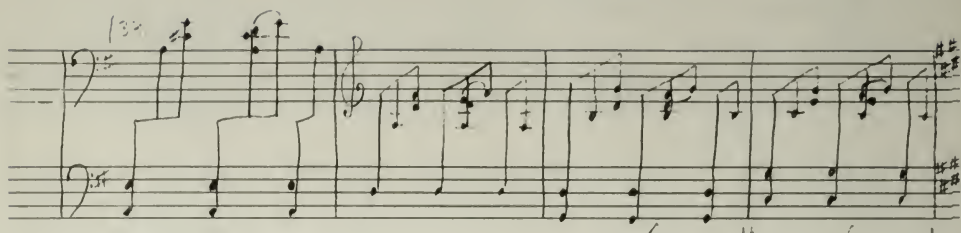
Handwritten musical score for the first system. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is common time (C). The first staff is marked **VIVACE** and the second staff is marked **p LEGATO**. The music consists of eighth and sixteenth notes in the treble clef and quarter notes in the bass clef.

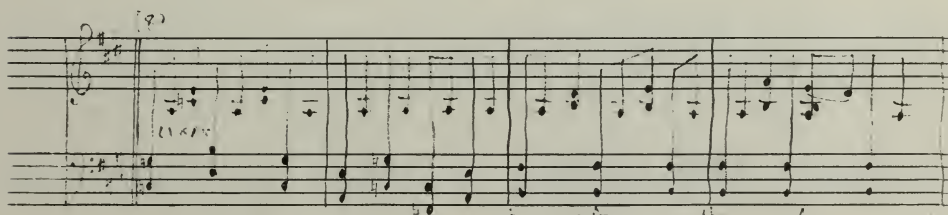
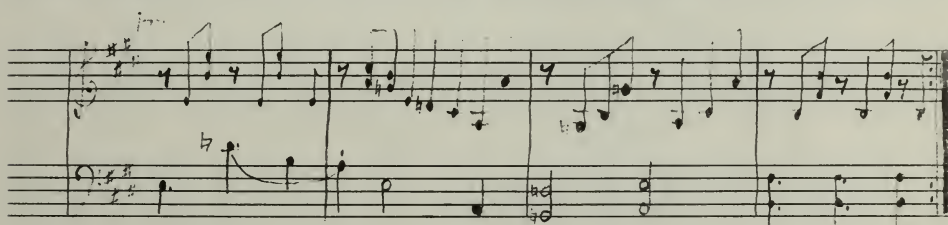
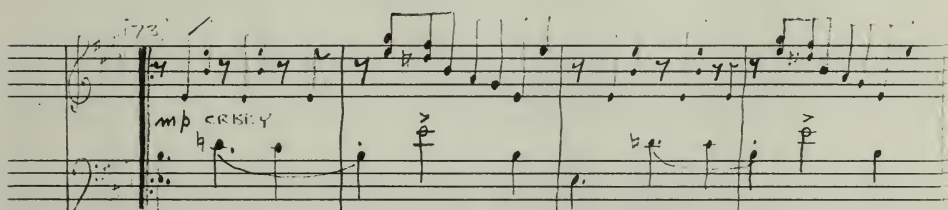
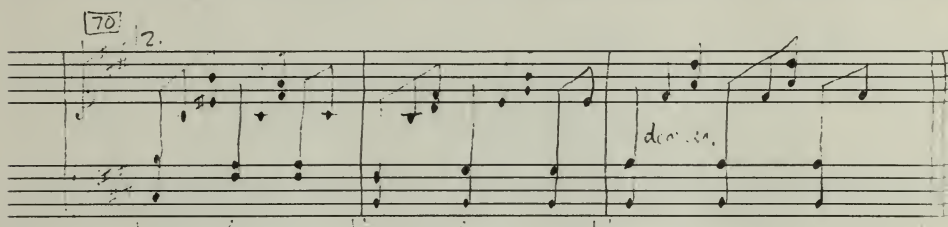
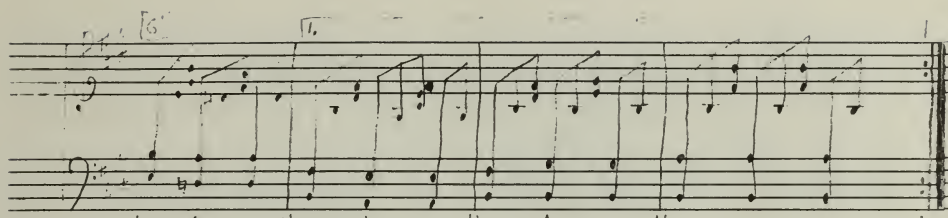
Handwritten musical score for the second system, starting at measure 9. The treble clef staff continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef staff has whole notes.

Handwritten musical score for the third system, starting at measure 17. The treble clef staff continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef staff has whole notes.

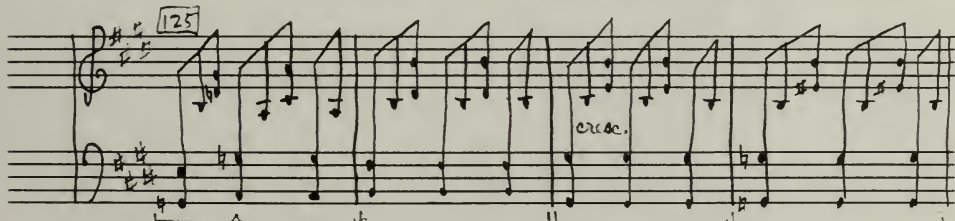
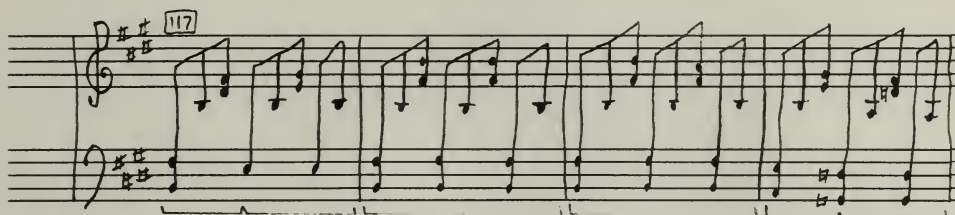
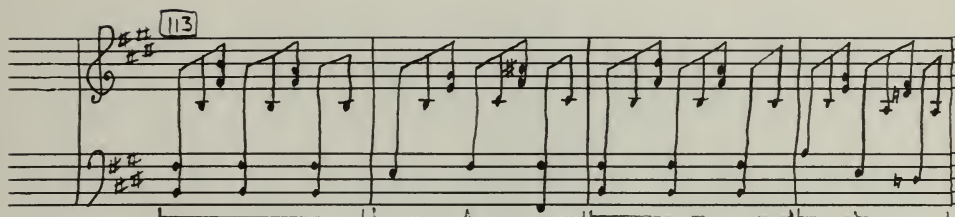
Handwritten musical score for the fourth system, starting at measure 25. The treble clef staff continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef staff has whole notes.

Handwritten musical score for the fifth system, starting at measure 29. The treble clef staff continues with eighth and sixteenth notes, while the bass clef staff has whole notes. The word **cresc.** is written below the bass clef staff.





Handwritten musical score for 10 staves, measures 93-110. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). It includes dynamic markings like *cresc.*, *mf*, and *f*. The notation is dense with many beamed notes and slurs.



(133)

mf *cresc.*

mf *cresc.*

(141)

mf *cresc.*

(144)

mf *cresc.*

(147)

mf *cresc.*

Handwritten musical score for piano, consisting of 10 staves. The score is written in treble and bass clefs with a key signature of one sharp (F#). It includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like 'f' and 'cresc.'. Measure numbers 151, 155, 160, and 164 are indicated in boxes above the staves. The score concludes with a double bar line and a repeat sign.



Simple sister
You say you don't give a shit,
but you're lonely —
that's really it.
You sit beside a weed
and wonder what it's like
to be a flower —
then you reach out and pick it.

Milk weed
Silky mink weed
Tickling meek world
Tea and silk world
Teak wood.



I touch the ground and sky
and somewhere in between
I reach out my hand to touch you
You stand firm or fly away
and I feel the wind
as you pass.
As you pass
But coming 'round we meet,
we break the sky
and fall into the nothingness
of all
Dancing, Laughing, Silent
Be,
We are for brokenness is sky
and earth
And in her bond you fly away
and I, I tumble 'round
till walking my own
way I feel you
pass
and smile at you
for we are free.

songful of sea fog

our farm is not near the impetuous sea
but inland —
where farms belong.
but sometimes
when the wind blows right
billows of sea fog gently drift in.
and the air is a thousand milk-weed puffs
wafting and swirling around
never quite settling down
from their burst pod
the sky.
and our barns are lost to a spirited mass
and i can't see ahead in feet or in hours
but am sitting
listening gently
to a songful of sea fog.





Laughing gull lazy in flight by blue water
roost on a red nun
fluff wings and watch.

Then up to tree height, gliding on
warm air

Aloof and untouchable
far from man.

Free soaring lightly, over green islands
peaceful with black face
blended with pines

A shot from the rocks on the shore
and its ended.

Blue water watches
and waits to receive

With blood on the wings it falls.

Land in the reeds, the
march at low water.

Laughing gull dead on its back
in the mud.

Blind Buck

"Oh my God, what is all that racket? Bach too. James is up."

Downstairs in the kitchen James was working hard to get breakfast going.

"Good morning, Laura."

"Hi."

"Feel better?"

"Okay I guess."

"Want some breakfast? Toast is all I have."

"Just coffee thanks."

James began to stack the stove. He shook out the old grinds and washed the pot.

"What you wanna do?"

"I don't know. Maybe drive around. This is the first time I've been here."

"Fine."

"Can you make it. I mean so early?"

"Drink your coffee and shut up. Let me decide what is best for me."

Peter walked in the door. Tommy crawled in after his father.

"Good morning, James. Who's that?"

"Peter, meet Laura, from Arizona."

James got up to pour Peter a cup of coffee. "Where's Gay?"

Peter dumped four teaspoons of sugar into his coffee, overflowed it with cream. He was wearing shabby clothes. His big hands were smudged with dirt and nicotine. He smiled at me. All I could see was his squinty eyes and brown teeth. I looked away. "She's home, cleaning the house so you and what's-her-name can come to dinner."

"What makes you think we're coming?"

"You'd do anything for free booze." Peter looked down at Tommy. He was sitting in a pile of match covers and lime peels. Peter picked Tommy up and walked out the door.

"Who in the hell was that?" I got up and walked into the living room.

"Peter and Gay live on Blind Buck Road. I don't have many neighbors. Peter is really a great person."

"He sounds like a bull."

"You'll see. Go get dressed."

We rode out into the country in silence. James' hands shook on the wheel. He was chain smoking. He drove us out to a state park. The roads were muddy; inevitably James got the car stuck about five miles from the highway.

"God damnit, now we'll never get out." James got out of the car. He walked to the back which was sunk in four inches of mud.

"Don't get so riled. With a little man power we'll get out."

"Look, you pull forward on go, fast as hell."

"What are you going to do? Stand there?"

"Shut up damn it. Do you want to push?"

"No."

I put the car in forward. James gave me the signal, I pulled out, the wheels turned up all the mud in his face which was red from pushing the car.

"Stop."

I laughed and got out of the car. "James, don't you know what you are doing?"

"What else IS there?"

"You could start by getting out of the way."

"Bitch!", James paused to wipe the mud off his face, "Hey! Where are you going?"

"First I'm going to find something to put under the wheels. Then I'm going to get us out of here. Then I'M going to get smashed!"

"Laura don't."

"What?"

"Why do you have to do it this way?"

"Lood James, you're sweet but . . ."

"I'm trying."

"Sure you are. But you can't do it." I picked up a handful of pine needles and branches

James was sitting on the backend of the car. "If you could find the courage, maybe you could help." We piled the branches underneath the wheels. In twenty minutes we had the car turned around and out of the whole.

"Now you're going to drive me home and put me to bed, I suppose."

"Okay, Okay, Okay, I give up."

"Why do you keep coming back for more?"

"I need you."

"You need someone to step on."

"I'm sorry I said."

"Why don't you give me a chance then?"

"I think every time I come back you'll be big enough to take it."

"You kill me before I even get a chance."

At six-thirty we got in the car and drove down Blind Buck Road to the Shulmans. James jumped out of the car and opened the door for me.

"You seem like you are on your first high-school date."

"Come on, let's go in." James opened the door on the porch.

"Hey, Anybody home?" Peter met us at the door.

"Good, you made it. Come in bring your friend."

"My name is Laura, thanks."

"James, pour the drinks, I'll be back."

"What's up?"

"Gay has tried to kill the baby again." Peter walked past out onto the porch.

"James, what the hell is . . ."

"Listen, keep still. This has happened before."

"Oh, I see, it is a game of knock off the baby and Gay is it."

"No. Gay will be in, in a minute. Let's wait." In the kitchen I heard Tommy crying. Gay ran down the stairs and out to the porch, screaming, "Give me my baby."

"Shut up and leave him alone." Peter's voice reverberated back.

"I'm gonna take him and leave."

James went into the kitchen. He brought Tommy out into the living room, "Here, hold him."

"Please James, tell me what is going on."

"There is nothing we can do right now."

I picked Tommy up and put him on my hip. The cellar door was unlocked. I let Tommy play with the latch. After managing to lock, and unlock the door, Tommy stopped crying. Everyone's attention was diverted from the screaming outside. Gay escaped Peter's clutch. She ran inside crying.

"GIVE ME MY BABY. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY BABY?" She ripped Tommy off my hip and ran out the back door. Peter came running in after her.

"Where's the baby? Who took it?"

"Gay."

"Where?"

"Out the back door."

Peter ran out the back door. A car engine started and backed out the driveway.

"Oh, my God. James do something."

"What can I do?", James poured himself a drink.

"Don't you know what he's going to do to her?"

"Yes."

"Do you care?"

"I care if I get beat up in the process."

"Is your hide worth more than that child's, or Gay's?"

"No, but . . ."

"Peter will kill her. Or maybe that little boy."

"I'm no match for Peter. He outweighs me by a ton."

Peter stomped into the room. Gay was clenched in one hand, Tommy hanging in the other. He shoved his son to me, "Here. Don't let Gay get her hands on him." Peter dragged Gay into the kitchen. James cowered.

"James, stop Peter. I don't care what that woman did." James snuck into the kitchen. Peter brought out a plate of lasagne and some apple juice.

"Here, feed him."

Gay was crying on the floor. James had ventured enough to go to her. She was shaking in his arms, "Don't let him take my baby away. Please don't."

"Get your god-damned pimping hands off my wife." Peter ripped Gay away and to her feet, "You are never going to touch my son again." James' feelings had been hurt enough to stand up.

"Listen, Peter, you are six time bigger than I am, but you can't do this to Gay."

"Who says?" Peter slapped Gay across the floor, "Now maybe you'll learn."

James was red in the face. He stepped back. He slugged Peter in the stomach. Peter fell back. "Whoa, James, please get out of my life. I don't want to hurt you."

"You can't anymore than you already have."

Peter belted James. It knocked him out cold. Gay was on the floor crying, "Peter, I didn't mean it."

"Like hell. Ever since we had that kid, you've hated it."

"I just went out of the room for a minute . . ."

"I'm going to give you a plane ticket back to California."

"I had to set the table."

"Your mother can put up with your sniveling."

"Tommy knocked the lamp over on himself."

"Never again."

"Hey James, get up." Gay poured him a drink. James got up and sat down in a chair.

"You shouldn't get so riled. It is bad for your health."

"Laura are you alright?" James called out. I picked up Tommy and went into the kitchen. "Here have a drink, let's go."

As we drove up Blind Buck Road, on the left side of the road the Shulman's station wagon was in a ditch, two doors open, and the headlights were on.

"You see Laura, you probably know as much as I do about Peter and Gay."



Monday afternoon sometime —

the alphabet soup has fried itself out
can't shout anymore
the door shut because i didn't open my mouth when it hurt
or bite you back
or pull out your bleached-blond roots with angry fists

the ticket-taker tells me that the time-clock's off-key
too many punches made him lose the tune
leave the room empty, like me
gone wacky to the pokey
but it's O-KEY

he whittles a fiddle, plays tiddley-winks on the checker-board
minute maid wheel of lady's fortune ring
seconds are only pawns, you know
and the minute-hand was jailed for making obscene gestures
he grew an elbow.
for to play jacks with the jaily-bird
They ate their curds, fell fastasleep
when the catinthehatcameback
He said, "dissipate is to character as erosion is to rocks."
the elbow winked, poked the cu-coo-coo
unruffled and chimed, "White lie
 White lie
 Bye-Bye."

"Scat," said the Hat, "it's not like that." "Sometimes alphabet soup forgets what it's like
to make a word. It can only stutter beautifully. And when it does, i am left to say nothing,
be nothing. In the bottom of the bowl lies the jail in my bird. Cu-coo.

Mike Nelson verses the Deadlies

The thing I most remember about his house was the organ. It wasn't an ordinary organ it was a huge hulking beast of an antique organ. The monstrosity rested on one side of his living room. There were four keys missing but they were at the ends so it didn't matter. Directly above and perpendicular to the keyboard was a row of thirty-five levers of the push-pull type which when used in the hands of a master produced an infinite variety of tones and volumes. In our chubby little hands the levers simply provided great tactile enjoyment, but whenever Beethoven, Bach, and Mickey Mouse got boring and the levers miraculously changed into the controls of a submarine, a tank, and most favorite of all a bomber of the B-52 type which (whenever a lever was manipulated) dropped such a ferocity of bombs on the unsuspecting populace and created such havoc and destruction as to rival Dresden and even Hiroshima itself.

But prior to any military operations there was always at least 10 minutes of flogging the beast in a vain attempt to draw "music" from it. Operating that organ was not as easy as operating organs of today. There was no electricity when the organ was made and one had to pump a bellows to get sound. That is why he had to wait for me to arrive before he could start playing for, while it only took one moderately sized adult to operate the instrument, it took two "pint sized kids" to operate it. One of us would sit on the bench while the other would get down on his hands and knees below the first and pump furiously with his hands urged on by the shouts of his partner. "Come on, will ya, pump faster! If you don't pump harder I'm not gonna do it for you!" At which time the person pumping away on the floor would either kick or bite the soloist. After five minutes we switched and after ten the war began.

The second thing that I loved about his house were the magic markers. Most homes have a few for labeling and such, but his home had hundreds, thousands, millions, billions of magic markers. Everywhere you looked there were five or six lying about. His mother was a public relations person and she used the markers to make posters and graphs. We used them for everything you can think of and even more things you can't. We built castles with them. We used them as soldiers. When *we* were soldiers they became bullets, bayonets, hypodermics (for the medics), binoculars, grenades, walkie-talkies, pistols, land mines, and (when one of us got tired of playing) an atomic device which completely killed the enemy (even if he had a bullet proof vest on) and thus ended the game. On certain occasions we would use the markers (curiously enough) to draw with. He was great. I am sure he would have become a great artist. I was rotten. As he would draw my portrait I would create a picture of him in the infamous stick-man manner. Whenever I see a magic marker (it must be a Marks-alot brand for that is all his mother would use) I immediately think of him.

One day he had something new, something really unbelievably fantastic, in his room; scuba tanks. At least we thought they were scuba tanks (this was before space was big or I am sure we would have thought they were spaceman's tanks). He instantly became Mike Nelson and put the air hose on. It wasn't exactly like Mike's because instead of

going *in* the mouth it *covered* the mouth and the nose. The cord was long and thin instead of short and fat. The entire arrangement was clear plastic instead of black rubber, but as newcomers to the scuba diving game we didn't mind. While he was Mike Nelson I took on the roles of deadly seaweed, deadly eels, deadly octopuses, deadly sharks, deadly whales, and deadly logs-that-fall-and-trap-the-unsuspecting-Mike-Nelson. He fought these deadlies with magic markers in the form of a knife and a spear gun. The battles all took place in a four foot half sphere because the tanks were leaned against a wall and they were too heavy for us to move. That small area was sufficient to keep our attention for the entire afternoon.

That was one of the last times I saw him. He didn't come to school anymore and I couldn't go to his house much. One time he came to school for a visit and brought his new pet, a hamster. He let me hold it because I was his best friend. It crawled all over me and ended up in my pocket where it promptly went to the bathroom. It was the last time I saw him laugh. About a month later he died. What happened was the deadlies had fallen, and trapped Mike Nelson until he ran out of air.

Courant Spring 1972

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